

Abstract ID : 460

Title : Two calves in echelon: alloparental association in Atlantic white-sided dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*)?

Category : Behavior

Student : Not Applicable

Preferred Format : Poster Presentation

Abstract : Cetacean calves routinely swim in echelon position (calf just behind dorsal fin and under mid-section of adult) with their mothers and occasionally with other individuals. On August 2, 2002 we observed an adult Atlantic white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) swimming with two calves in echelon position, one on each side, three times over a ninety-minute period, within a group of 20 dolphins. The adult and calves displayed synchronous surfacings and movements. Both calves were estimated to be the same length and approximately 12 - 18 months old. Four possible explanations for this behavior are considered: twins, chance association, and alloparental association in the form of "babysitting" or adoption. We believe that it is unlikely that this behavior can be explained by chance or twins. Neither "babysitting" nor adoption has been previously observed in white-sided dolphins. However, the presence of a dead lactating female, found five days before the observation (July 28) gives support to the adoption hypothesis. Collision with a boat was the presumable cause of death, based on necropsy findings. Although the adult with which the calves were associated was not photographed, other members of the group had been previously photographed in the area on July 19 and 21. Therefore, we believe that the observed situation may represent a form of adoption, but it is not known if the adult was providing any care (such as nursing) to one or both of the calves. Although the hydrodynamic advantages of echelon position in a calf one year old or older are unknown, the mere proximity of the calf to the adult may be useful for safety and social learning.